

Troop Tribute Trashed

Town officials remove Round Pond ribbons

By KEITH L. MARTIN

A tranquil tribute to U.S. soldiers and others killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom has stirred up a lot of noise around Duxbury after the memorial was ordered to be taken down by town officials and dozens of yellow ribbons were thrown away.

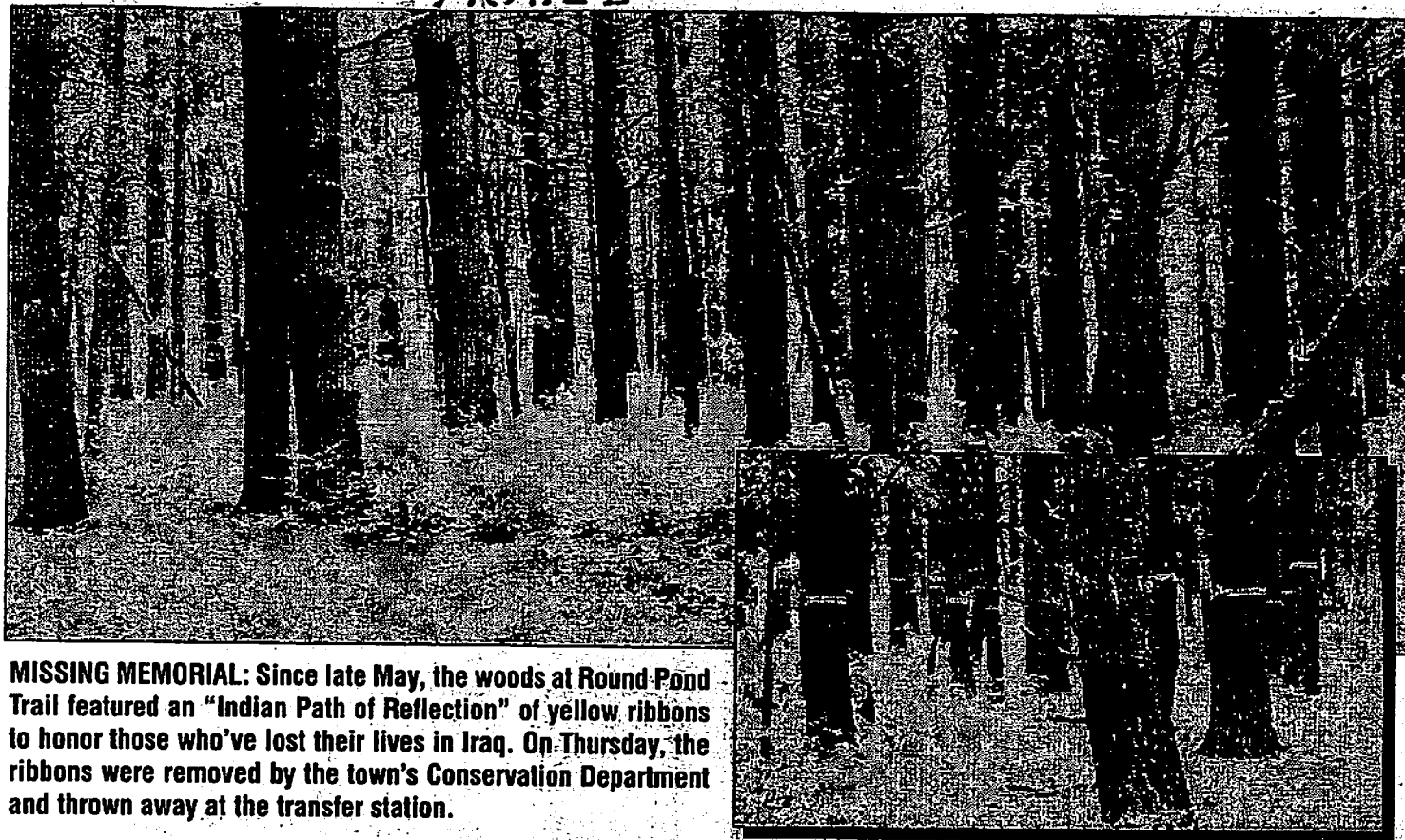
The memorial, located in the woods of the Round Pond trails off Mayflower Street, featured ribbons tied around trees with the names of 632 soldiers killed in combat as well as others who lost their lives in Iraq written on them.

No one claimed responsibility for putting up the ribbons, which began appearing in the woods in late May, until they were cut down and thrown away by members of the town's Conservation Department. Duxbury resident Ed Hardy, 65, came forward on Thursday and acknowledged hanging the ribbons after learning that the town had moved his tribute

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TRAILS

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MISSING MEMORIAL: Since late May, the woods at Round Pond Trail featured an "Indian Path of Reflection" of yellow ribbons to honor those who've lost their lives in Iraq. On Thursday, the ribbons were removed by the town's Conservation Department and thrown away at the transfer station.

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Town Removes, Throws Away Round Pond Ribbons

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from the forest at Round Pond to the trash pit at the transfer station.

On Thursday afternoon, Conservation Agent Joe Grady and interns Matt Homsy and Jenna Moody used knives to cut down the ribbons and then placed them in a cardboard box. Following the removal of the ribbons, Grady said that the pair dropped him off at his truck in the parking lot at the beginning of the trails so he could run another errand for the department. After leaving Grady, the interns proceeded to the town's transfer station and threw the ribbons away.

"We threw them away because we thought they were supposed to be thrown away," said Homsy. "Joe Grady left and we didn't know what to do."

Grady said that after "neatly" cutting down the ribbons, he did instruct the interns to put them either in his office or the selectmen's office so whoever they belonged to could pick them up later. He said that instead, he thinks the interns were so shaken by having the *Patriot Ledger* taking their picture as they removed the ribbons that they instead threw the box with the ribbons away.

"We had every intent of saving them and giving them to whoever the appropriate person was," said Grady. "They were so shaken...they mistakenly threw them away."

Grady added that he was "disappointed" in Hardy as he knows the members of the conservation commission, selectmen and others involved with town land through experiences in the past and knew who to ask for permission to put up the ribbons.

"He knows these people and should've approached us," he said. "This was clearly an anti-war message and he's a peace activist and this went beyond being a memorial. If it was a memorial and not a protest, we would've found a spot for it."

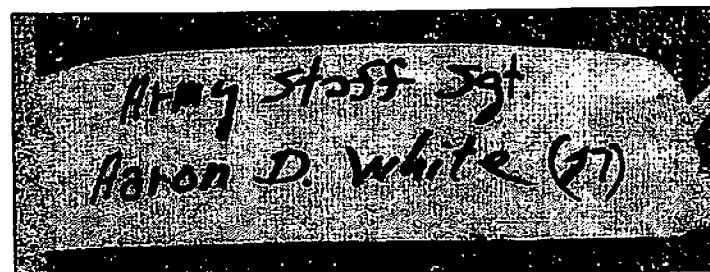
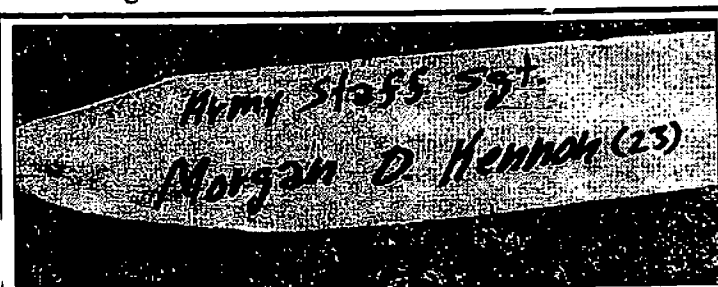
Grady said that he is "saddened" by the whole episode and wished it had never happened.

Longo said he too was disappointed that the ribbons were thrown away, but "understood what happened" in terms of the miscommunication.

"The person who did this had a good concept in their mind, but we had no idea who [the ribbons] belonged to," he said. "They could've belonged to a visitor to the town or anyone."

After learning of the ribbons' removal, Hardy went to

Hall to retrieve his ribbons. Around 3:30 p.m. on Friday, Hardy confronted Longo about the takedown of the ribbons and the discussion that followed got so heated that Longo called Duxbury police, who asked Hardy to leave the town manager's office.



Duxbury resident Ed Hardy, his daughter and her boyfriend spent months working on the tribute, listing the names and ages of over 600 U.S. troops who died overseas.

"I just exploded," said Hardy. "I asked him for the ribbons and he told me they were taken to the dump, so I asked him if he ever saw the names of those honored through the ribbons. [Longo] told me he never saw any names on them and all he

something about Iraqi babies,' and that's when I got upset and called him a liar."

Police calmed Hardy and on his way to leave Town Hall, he encountered Homsy and Moody who were finishing up a day of work for the Conservation Department.

Homsy said he, Moody and "a third person," who neither would identify as Grady, used a knife to cut down the ribbons in about 20 minutes.

After Grady left them, the two then went to the dump and threw out the ribbons, said Homsy.

Hardy asked the pair if they knew what the memorial was about.

"I knew what it was all about; it was to honor those who died in Afghanistan and Iraq, but I was just following the orders of my job," said Homsy. "I personally don't think they should've been taken down."

No apologies from town officials

Town officials also expressed little sympathy for the fate of the memorial following its removal last week, saying it was a misuse of public property.

Longo reiterated his previous stance that the tribute was placed on town land with no permission being sought to create it and because it was done anonymously, the town had no one to contact about it.

"Somebody violated the rules," said Longo. "Joe Grady

has acres and acres of land to oversee and if we let people violate the rules and regulations, we'll have a big problem. Someone did something...and suggested it was a memorial, but we still have rules and regulations for that land."

He added that before Special Town Meeting in June, when citizens approached him to put plywood cows on the lawn of Town Hall to encourage the purchase of the O'Neil Farm, the town felt it was a political statement and offered other suggestions to the group. He said that in the case of the memorial, no one ever asked permission and with no one claiming responsibility, there was no one to work with on an alternate solution.

Longo added that when he told the *Clipper* last week that the tribute would last 30 days, he meant from the day it was first discovered by town officials and not 30 more days.

"We let it stay up for 30 days and intended to preserve [the ribbons] even though some of them were frayed," he said.

Selectmen Chairman Andre Martecchini said that he was the one who ordered the ribbons be cut down on Thursday after conferring with Longo. He added that he relayed the decision to selectmen John Tuffy and Betsy Sullivan, who Martecchini said had no objection.

Martecchini said that recent media coverage of the ribbons, including last week's *Clipper* article, sparked the decision to take the ribbons down, serving as a reminder that the memorial was still up.

"There was originally some thought given to tracking down the person [responsible] and having them identify themselves and [Longo] did talk to some in town to get their opinion on the matter and that process lasted about a couple weeks," he said. "At a certain point, I said we can't do this...and I talked to [Grady] directly and told him to hold onto them if someone wanted to claim them."

On Friday, Martecchini said he was unaware that the ribbons were thrown away.

"I would've preferred them to be held onto, but it happens," he said.

Martecchini likened the placing of the yellow ribbons in Round Pond to someone putting them all over the Powder Point Bridge, saying that both were an "inappropriate use of public space."

"There are methods to follow...but to just go ahead and do something like this is unacceptable," he said.

Tuffy said that he had no issue with Martecchini's decision to take down the ribbons, agreeing it was "inappropriate." He added that if the town allows its property to be used for "advocacy reasons" it has to allow all groups to do so and in one case, it may be something the town objects to.

As for the discarding of the ribbons, Tuffy said that he did find it unfortunate.

"They should've been removed and boxed up for whoever came forward," he said. "This was a labor of love on someone's part even though this person decided to use town property to make a statement."